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How Trump's Jerusalem decision may open the door for a one-state solution

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The United Nations has overwhelmingly voted to reject the U.S. recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. As expected from a Trump White House, the administration's U.N. ambassador had gone as far as to issue threats that the United States was "taking names" and would retaliate against countries that chose to vote against it - threats defied by the vast majority of the world's nations.

Having issued the recognition declaration, Trump bizarrely insisted that his move would not derail the peace process but mark the "beginning of a new approach" to the conflict. Aside from the PR blow from the U.N., Trump's statement may prove too clever by half - his declaration may precipitate a transformation in the nature of the conflict, and not in the way he intended.

The Middle East peace process has been moribund for years - in the face of expanding Israeli settlements, Arab regional collapse, and Palestinian desperation and lack of leadership. But for more than two decades, the two-state solution has been considered the internationally accepted "gold standard," with the United States playing the role of "impartial broker." Few believed the United States to be impartial, but everyone at least pretended it to be - until now. Trump's declaration - followed by a U.N. Security Council veto on Tuesday - is "the kiss of death" to the two-state solution itself.

To mainstream parties, the two-state solution remains "too big to fail," and they continue to regard it as the only realistic paradigm through which a settlement can be imagined. Yet the two-state solution is more than just a framework for a final settlement - by shaping the future relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, it determines the very nature of the conflict. As currently conceived, Palestinians are involved in a struggle of national liberation, at the end of which Israel withdraws from occupied territory, and a Palestinian nation-state is declared.

Although considered the best possible compromise, the two-state solution hasn't been without challenge. Top Israeli politicians have made public statements that call into question their commitment to it. Last year, only four out of 20 Israeli government ministers openly supported a two-state solution (a sentiment preceded, and confirmed, by continuing settlement activity). A variety of reasons are cited, including security concerns, geostrategic reasons and religious justifications.

Despite this maximalism, Israel needs a Palestinian state. The biggest threat to Israel as an ethnostate - a "Jewish" state - isn't military but demographic - a Palestinian "state" can ensure a Jewish majority in the "Jewish" state. Instead, current Israeli leaders think that they can push Palestinians into Bantustans, or just keep crushing them indefinitely. This is unsustainable and feeds Palestinian pessimism about the viability of a final settlement and the form and sovereignty of the eventual Palestinian state.

I am in the minority of voices that see the two-state solution as a solution from another century - or, charitably, as a noble experiment that failed. It is time we explore a radical alternative: One democratic, secular state in which Jews and Arabs are equal citizens. Shifting paradigms will have many consequences - importantly, it transforms the Palestinian struggle from a fight for national liberation to a struggle for equality and civil rights.

Struggles for national liberation bear a zero-sum view of the conflict, ensuring there are always winners and losers, such as only balance of power decides who wins more and who loses more. Such struggles are also far more likely to drift towards cycles of violence, where they can remain stuck for decades, amplifying toxic narratives and actors on both sides. Sadly this isn't just analysis - today it's our bitter reality.

I acknowledge that a struggle for civil rights under a one-state solution will have few friends. Parties invested in the two-state solution will oppose it as "unrealistic;" Israel will reject it since it threatens its "Jewishness." Arab regimes would rather avoid the contradiction of supporting civil rights in Palestine while crushing them at home. Militant groups would also oppose it - rights-based narratives are alien to them, and in their worldview, violence is the only way.

But this is why such a framing of the conflict would be so powerful. The struggle for justice in the Holy Land is eminently moral - which is why many scoundrels on both sides hide behind it. Waging a nonviolent struggle for civil rights sidelines violent actors, activates more of our people and garners grass-roots international support. Importantly, it has a better chance of long-term success - history is full of defeated movements for national liberation, but there arguably hasn't been a single civil rights struggle that was permanently

defeated.

I'm aware that mine is a minority view and that at this point this sounds almost quixotic - but so did many successful civil rights movements, when they started.

We won't soon see a two-state or a one-state solution in the Holy Land; sadly, we're far more likely to see a continuation to the cycle of violence and hatred. But we should extend our time frame and think in terms of eventual sustainability. Two people can always coexist on a narrow strip of land - in fact, it's always ever been the case. But two nationalisms? As the Arabic proverb rhetorically asks: "Can two swords share one scabbard?"

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